

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express our grave concerns about recent reports of inadequate supplies of body armor and force-protection equipment for troops being deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

According to a report by the Department of Defense in late 2005, many of the fatalities caused by upper body injuries in Iraq could be prevented if all body armor issued to our troops included side armor plates. In response to this report, many of us in the Senate asked then-Secretary Rumsfeld to ensure that the best available body armor be delivered to our soldiers in harm's way as quickly as possible. We were assured that the Department of Defense would promptly begin procurement and delivery of an additional 230,000 sets of side armor plates.

A January 25, 2007 report from the Inspector General, however, found continued shortages in force-protection equipment for our soldiers. The report found shortages in body armor, up-armored vehicles, communications equipment, and electronic countermeasure devices. We have also heard first-hand accounts that many service members being issued body armor are still not receiving side armor plates. It seems reasonable to surmise that if a service member requires body armor for their job, the side armor plates would provide extra protection.

These accounts alone are troubling, but the President's plan to send more than 20,000 additional troops to Baghdad raises further questions about our ability to properly equip and protect our men and women in uniform. When asked by *The Washington Post* about the President's surge proposal, Lt. Gen. Stephen Speakes, the Army's deputy chief of staff for force development, said: "We don't have the [armor] kits, and we don't have the trucks." This statement raises grave concerns about our ability to equip and protect not just the soldiers that are currently fighting, but also the new soldiers that the President is planning to send to Baghdad.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully ask that you provide us an update of how many troops currently in Iraq and Afghanistan have not been issued body armor with side armor plates. In addition, we would like to know what percentage of troops currently being mobilized in support of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are not being issued complete sets of body armor that include side armor plates. We would also like to know the number and proportion of troops in each of the services, including figures for both the National Guard and the Reserve, receiving this essential protective equipment. Finally, we would like to know what steps the Department

of Defense is taking to implement the recommendations made by the Inspector General in its January 25 report on force-protection equipment shortages among deployed units.

We are sure you agree that our men and women in uniform deserve nothing less than the best protective equipment. If there are indeed shortages of complete body armor sets, or shortages of other force-protection equipment, among our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, we urge you to take immediate action to correct this grave problem. You can be certain that we stand ready with our colleagues to assist you overcome any shortfall that you identify in the most expeditious way possible.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Ken Salzman

Susan Collins

Blanch L. Lincoln

Stephen Scaum

Dick Deuk

John M. ...

Byron L. Doy

Rebbie Stenow

Frank R. Lautenberg

Robert A. Menendez

Maria Cantwell

Th. W. ...

Julia House

Chuck Schum

Bob Brown

Chris D. M.

John F. Kerry